

Message Text

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ACTION ARA-20

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TO SECSTATE WASHDC 1413

INFO AMEMBASSY MANAGUA

AMEMBASSY PANAMA

AMEMBASSY

AMEMBASSY SAN SALVADOR

AMEMBASSY TEGUCIGALPA

CINCSO

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION TWO OF THREE GUATEMALA 5699

2. GOVERNMENT COALITION CANDIDATE GENERAL LAUGERUD, WHO WAS HAND-PICKED BY PRESIDENT ARANA, GOT OFF TO A SLOW START IN JANUARY AND HAS BEEN HAMPERED BY THE FACT THAT MLN LEADER MARIO SANDOVAL, WHOSE NAME IS SYNONYMOUS WITH RIGHT WING REPRESSION IN THE MINDS OF MANY, INSISTED ON THE VICE-PRESIDENTIAL NOMINATION AS THE PRICE FOR MLN PARTICIPATION IN THE COALITION. LAUGERUD HAS THE ADVANTAGE OF OFFICIAL SUPORT, AMPLE CAMPAIGN FUNDS, AND EIGHT MONTHS OF WORKING TO BECOME KNOWN IN THE NATION. FROM A LACKLUSTER BEGINNING HE HAS DEVELOPED INTO AN EFFECTIVE CAMPAIGN SPEAKER AND HAS HAD TIME TO DEVELOP HIS POSITION AS LEADER OF HIS TEAM. THE TEAM ITSELF HAS HAD SERIOUS INTERNAL PROBLEMS, BUT THERE HAS BEEN TIME TO SMOOTH MOST OF THEM OVER, AND LAUGERUD'S CAMPAIGN TEAM SEEMS THE BEST ORGANIZED AT THIS POINT LAUGERUD HAS BEEN SUCCESSFUL IN INSISTING THAT POPULAR FORMER GUATEMALA CITY MAYOR RAMIRO PONCE MONTTOY HEAD THE COALITION FRONT'S CONGRESSIONAL SLATE FROM THE CAPITAL, WHICH SHOULD HELP THE COALITION IN THE AREA WHERE IT FEELS WEAKEST.

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3. OPPOSITION FRONT CANDIDATE GENERAL RIOS MONTT

OWES HIS NOMINATION TO CHRISTIAN DEMOCRATIC PARTY LEADER DE LEON SCHLOTTER, WHO SWITCHED TO HIM FROM COL. ENRIQUE PERALTA AT THE LAST MINUTE IN LATE SEPTEMBER. RIOS, A CHARISMATIC SPEAKER, HAS ATTRACTED MAYOR MANUEL COLOM ARGUETA, WHO HAS RESIGNED HIMSELF TO THE FACT THAT THE GOVERNMENT WILL NOT GIVE HIM A CHANCE TO RUN HIMSELF BY INSCRIBING HIS FURD AS A PARTY, AND DISSIDENT PR LEADER ALBERTO FUENTES MOHR, WHO WAS NAMED THE FRONT'S VICE-PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATE EARLY THIS MONTH. (BOTH COLOM AND DE LEON WANT TO RUN FOR PRESIDENT IN 1978, WHICH AN INCUMBENT VICE-PRESIDENT IS BARRED FROM DOING.) MANY ON THE RIGHT AND CENTER FEEL THAT RIOS MADE A MISTAKE IN NAMING FUENTES AS HIS RUNNING MATE, SINCE THIS GIVES THE FRONT A DECIDEDLY LEFTIST CAST WHICH WILL PREVENT RISO FROM GETTING MIDDLE-OF-THE-ROAD VOTES HE MIGHT OTHERWISE HAVE ATTRACTED. WE ARE NOT SO SURE THAT HAVING A LEFTIST CAST WILL HURT RIOS, WHOSE APPEAL IS TO THE LEFT IN ANY EVENT. RIOS HAS NOT YET HAD TIME TO ESTABLISH HIMSELF FIRMLY AS HIS TEAM'S UNDISPUTED LEADER, AND HE IS HAVING DIFFICULTY IN DOING SO SINCE POLITICIANS LIKE COLOM AND DE LEON HAVE BOTH RESOURCES RIOS NEEDS AND THEIR OWN FISH TO FRY. NEVERTHELESS, RIOS DID NOT GET TO BE A GENERAL, AND ARMY CHIEF OF STAFF WITHOUT LEADERSHIP QUALITIES, AND WE BELIEVE HE WILL PROBABLY BE ABLE TO STRENGTHEN HIS POSITION AS TIME GOES BY. IF HE WERE TO WIN, WE HAVE LITTLE DOUBT THAT HE WOULD ASSERT FIRM CONTROL OVER HIS GOVERNMENT.

4. COLONEL PAIZ NOVALES, THE REVOLUTIONARY PARTY CANDIDATE, GOT HIS NOMINATION IN LATE OCTOBER BECAUSE THE GOVERNMENT DECIDED THAT HE WOULD BEST SUIT THEIR STRATEGY TO SPLIT THE LEFT. THE GOVERNMENT HAD ABOUT DECIDED THAT PR SECRETARY-GENERAL CARLOS SAGASTUME WAS TOO WEAK TO ATTRACT ANY SIGNIFICANT NUMBER OF VOTES AWAY FROM RIOS. SAGASTUME, WHO HAD ACCEPTED GOG FINANCIAL AND OTHER ASSISTANCE IN HIS SUCCESSFUL THREE-YEAR STRUGGLE FOR CONTROL OF HIS PARTY ORGANIZATION, HAD COME TO CONCLUDE HIMSELF THAT HE COULD NOT WIN, AND HAD TENTATIVELY ARRANGED TO GIVE THE PR NOMINATION TO COL. PERALTA, WHEN THE GOVERNMENT CALLED ITS OPTIONS AND FORCED SAGASTUME TO RENEGE ON PERALTA AND COME TO TERMS WITH PAIZ. PAIZ, A FIGURE WITH GENUINE REVOLUTIONARY PARTY CREDENTIALS, RECOGNIZES THAT HE GOT THE PR NOMINATION AS PART OF THE GOVERNMENT'S PLAN TO SPLIT THE LEFT, BUT BELIEVES HE CAN UPSET THAT STRATEGY BY

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USING A CENTRIST APPROACH AND THE PR'S ONCE POWERFUL BASE TO ATTRACT ENOUGH VOTES FROM BOTH RIGHT AND LEFT TO WIN. HE IS SEVERLY HANDICAPPED, HOWEVER, BY THE FACT THAT HE HAD TO ACCEPT SAGASTUME AS HIS VICE-PRESIDENTIAL RUNNING MATE, AND MANY POTENTIAL PAIZ SUPPORTERS SUCH AS THE PR'S "OLD GUARD," AND POSSIBLY COL' PERALTA, ARE COMPLETELY TURNED OFF BY SAGASTUME WITH HIS REPUTATION FOR POLITICAL CHICANERY AND VENALITY.

5. THE GOVERNMENT'S ATTITUDE TOWARD ELECTIONS:
PRESIDENT ARANA HAS REPEATEDLY ASSERTED PUBLICLY THAT THERE WILL BE FREE ELECTIONS, AND LESS THAN THREE WEEKS AGO HE INSISTED IN A SPEECH AT CHIQUIMULA THAT HE WOULD TURN POWER OVER IN JULY TO WHOEVER WINS IN MARCH. HOWEVER, IN ANALYZING THIS STATEMENT ONE HAS TO TAKE INTO ACCOUNT THAT ARANA EXPECTS HIS HANDPICKED SUCCESSOR LAUGERUD TO WIN. IN THIS CONNECTION, WE HAVE NO INDICATION SO FAR THAT THE GOVERNMENT, HAVING ALREADY SUCCESSFULLY MANEUVERED TO GET AN ELECTORAL RACE FAIRLY MUCH TO ITS LIKING(THE IDEAL WOULD HAVE BEEN TO HAVE CARLOS SAGASTUME AND DE LEON SCHLOTTER, BOTH OF WHOM WOULD HAVE BEEN WEAK CANDIDATES, RUNNING AS THE STANDARD-BEARERS OF THE PR AND THE DCG RESPECTIVELY), INTENDS TO ENGAGE IN WIDE-SCALE FRAUD OR POLITICAL VIOLENCE. HOWEVER, THIS COULD CHANGE IF IT BEGINS TO LOOK LIKE EITHER PAIZ OR, MORE LIKELY RIOS, SEEMS TO BE OUT-STRIPPING LAUGERUD. IF PAIZ, WHO IS A LONG-TIME FRIEND OF PRESIDENT ARANA AND THE GODFATHER OF ONE OF HIS CHILDREN, WERE TO WIN, WE FEEL SURE THAT PRESIDENT ARANA WOULD TURN OVER THE REINS OF POWER. HOWEVER, EVEN THOUGH RIOS, FOR HIS PART, INSISTED THAT BOTH DE LEON SCHLOTTER AND MINISTER OF DEFENSE,

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